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Objectives in Christian Education

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OBJECTIVES IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

We are a group of Church School workers, engaged, undoubtedly, ~~in~~ in one of the most important phases of the Christian ministry. I wonder if we have ever before now thought of our work in those terms. Most of us have treated it as a side-line of minor importance, without much thought given to the fact that we have on our shoulders a great responsibility and at our hands a great opportunity. But it is true nevertheless that we are sowing seed which will some day come to fruition, either good or bad- good because of our earnest and prayerful efforts to work systematically and purposefully, or bad as a result of our careless negligence.

First we must bring ourselves to a recognition of the bigness of our task. If our Christianity means to us personally what it ought, then there is no task greater than that of bringing the same message to others. But is that what we are attempting to do? And this introduces us to the matter of objectives. So perhaps after all we must think first in terms of aims and objectives and, seeing those, we shall see the importance of our task, for the worth and value of effort must be measured in terms of results, and results are nothing more than the accomplishment in full or at least in part of the aims and objectives with which we began.

What are our objectives? Surely somewhere in the background of our thinking we do have some aims, we are working toward some goals. Let's call them out and formulate them so that we may examine them to see whether or not they are worthy. Let them at least become conscious objectives, then let us evaluate them. If they are adequate let us work them into a definite program; if they are inadequate let us give some thought to the matter of aims and adopt some that are satisfactory and worthy of our time and effort.

Unless we have definite aims and objectives we shall wander in our program and lose all sense of direction. If we have no place to go to, we will probably get nowhere, or if we should, how are we to know where we are? There is such an absolute futility in any attempt to carry on a program without well-defined objectives that, after our thinking has once been aroused to the matter, it is impossible to continue without becoming conscious of aims and goals and building our program around them.

How shall we arrive at some conclusions as to what our objectives as Church School workers are or ought to be? What is an objective? "An objective is a statement of a result consciously accepted as a desired outcome of a given process".(1) Then let us give some thought to the results which we wish to obtain. Further, what will well-defined objectives do for us in our program? What is their function? "Their function is to set a mark in advance".(2) Here are a few more detailed statements.

"Objectives give direction to the processes through which desirable changes are to be realized. They serve to give proper sequence to educational activities, ~~and~~ and introduce meaning into the process. They serve as guides to activity through which desirable changes may be produced. They serve as guides to the selection of materials for use in the effective carrying out of desirable activities. They serve as measures of the effectiveness of the educational processes".(3)

There are comprehensive objectives which give direction to the program as a whole, such as "The development of Christlike character". There also need to be specific objectives such as "The practice of returning lost property to its rightful owner". As a group we must decide upon some comprehensive objectives and outline for ourselves the general results we wish to obtain. Then each one of us will decide upon specific objectives according to the situations and the needs of the individuals with whom we work.

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| (1) | Vieth- | "Objectives in Religious Education"- | p.18 |
| (2) | " | " | p.19 |
| (3) | " | " | p.21 |

Now for our comprehensive objectives. How shall we determine what they ought to be? Shall we think in terms of maturity and attempt to prepare the children for adulthood, or shall we think of present situations and help them to meet those situations at each stage of development, for after all, might not that be the best preparation for adulthood? Shall we think out a philosophy of religious training and proceed by rigidly holding to that philosophy, or ought we to investigate, experiment, and try different methods until we find those objectives which are adequate? Were we to do all of these and apply to them our best thinking and judgment, add to that the opinions and experiences of others who have been long in the field of Christian education, we would arrive at a statement of some comprehensive objectives which embrace the fundamental principles upon which we would build our program and toward which we would work. The International Council on Religious Education, by just some such process and with the cooperation of the best minds in this field, has arrived at a seven-fold statement of objectives which is comprehensive and adequate. Our conclusions, were we to work long and hard enough, would undoubtedly be essentially quite the same.

Here is the statement. Christian religious education seeks to foster in growing persons a consciousness of God as a reality in human experience, and a sense of personal relationship to Him. Second, it seeks to develop in growing persons such an understanding and appreciation of the personality, life, and teaching of Jesus as will lead to experience of Him as Savior and Lord, loyalty to Him and His cause, and manifest itself in daily life and conduct. Third, it seeks to foster in growing persons a progressive and continuous development of Christlike character. Fourth, it seeks to develop in growing persons the ability and disposition to participate in and contribute constructively to the building of a social order throughout the world, embodying the ideal of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Fifth, it seeks to develop in growing persons

the ability and disposition to participate in the organized society of Christians- the Church. Sixth, it seeks to lead growing persons into a Christian interpretation of life and the universe; the ability to see in it God's plan; a life philosophy built on this interpretation. And seventh, it seeks to effect in growing persons the assimilation of the best religious experience of the race, pre-eminently that recorded in the Bible, as guidance to present experience.

Are we willing to accept these objectives as adequate? Compare them with the aims of Him who Himself was the Master-Teacher- who aimed at the reconstruction of lives, the transformation and development of character, and the promotion of service on the part of those whom He transformed. Compare them with the goals of the great Apostle who stressed acceptance of Christ as Savior, and the expression of it in love-service and the development of Christlikeness. Set them over against the needs of humanity as we see them all about us, and the hopelessness that characterizes the attitude of the world in general.

If these are the objectives toward which we wish to work, let us cast them into a program and give ourselves to the carrying out of the Great Commission of our Lord-"Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world".

Now each one of us will have to adjust and adapt his part in this program to the particular individuals with whom he deals. The pupil, the person is the center of the program as Christ is the center of the objectives, and we will have to bring together the two centers and align our program with the objectives of which we have become conscious. Take an earnest and sincere interest in each pupil, study him, study the group,

and deduce specific objectives from the field of comprehensive ones that adapt themselves to and meet the needs of that particular group.

Christianity touches every phase of life, and while the first and most important thing is an introduction to and a vital relationship with Christ, we must not forget that every part of the pupil's life must be considered in our program. After a child has been saved, his play, his work, his activities in general ought not to be things aside from, but rather, expressions of his Christianity. He should be led to see these relationships, to correlate every phase of life to the spiritual, and to let each phase become Christianity in action.

The program must be made educational. The pupil must be instructed as to the things which tend to the development of Christlike character and the things which militate against it. He must learn what we mean when we speak, with reference to Christ, of His cause, and what is his responsibility with reference to other persons. He should learn the meaning and purpose of the Church and his relationship to it. Most of all, he should study the Bible itself, learn its precepts, breathe its spirit, apply its truths, and daily become better acquainted with its author.

We who are leaders and directors of this Christian religious education must first be sure of our relationship to God through Christ Jesus. To do effective work in leading others we must be filled with the Holy Spirit, our hearts must burn with compassion for our fellowmen, we must be faithful in prayer, fervent in spirit, and determined to serve the Lord.

Well Done